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# Contesting the Mainstream? Citizen News Platforms, the Alternative Paradigm, and the BP Oil Spill

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CONTESTING THE MAINSTREAM?  
CITIZEN NEWS PLATFORMS, THE ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM,  
AND THE BP OIL SPILL

by

Benjamin A. Lyons

B.A., Illinois College, 2010

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts.

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
December 2013

THESIS APPROVAL

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the field of Media Theory & Research

Approved by:

Dr. Aaron S. Veenstra, Chair

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Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
July 25, 2013

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

BENJAMIN A. LYONS, for the Master of Arts degree in  
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Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: CONTESTING THE MAINSTREAM? CITIZEN NEWS PLATFORMS,  
THE ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM, AND THE BP OIL SPILL

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Aaron S. Veenstra

With emerging content forums blurring the distinctions between journalistic paradigms, this study helps illuminate those which best promote alternative practice. A content analysis of Deepwater Horizon oil spill coverage compared three platforms for online citizen journalism: corporate (CNN iReport), alternative (Indymedia), and independent blogs. News stories were coded for sources, links, author-reader interaction, mobilizing information, tone for the liable parties' ability and intent in handling the disaster, and contestation of official information.

Results show that Indymedia was the most alternative in inclusion of mobilizing information, critical tone, contestation of mainstream versions, ratio of alternative links to mainstream, and total usage of alternative sources. iReport engendered the greatest rates of community via interaction, while also averaging the highest ratio of alternative sources. The blogs split on nearly all metrics, as one rated highly in every category and the other near last.

This analysis determines which platforms are most likely to cultivate disaster news that stands as alternative to, and not extension of, the mainstream. This study makes a contribution to the theory of alternative media and is the first to compare citizen journalism sites against one another in measuring their adherence to the alternative paradigm, and its examination of CNN's citizen-report model also represents a novel contribution. The findings discussed may help direct citizens as they reach out to online communities in times of disaster.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my delightful wife Danielle, my joyous son Julian, who crawled under the desk most days as I typed, and my dad, who has always had to put up with a devil's advocate.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of those who made this paper possible. Thanks and recognition are due to my advisor Dr. Aaron Veenstra, my committee members Dr. Bill Babcock and Dr. Scott McClurg, and the many scholars who inform this project to an unquantifiable degree. I would also like to thank my classmates, who have afforded me that benefit of vicarious learning. And on the path behind, appreciation goes to the teachers from my past who saw ahead more clearly than I.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Technological advances, especially the rise of Web 2.0, have contributed to the long-announced, systemic changes facing journalism. Professionals no longer have a corner on the information market, as citizens create and distribute content at ever increasing rates on ever diversifying platforms. One of the areas most impacted by these developments is crisis reporting (Mythen, 2009). For many reasons (most prominently, the favoring of location and speed over any old notions of quality control), citizens churning out real-time information during disasters are able to push their story to global audiences, often aided by established media organizations (Mythen, 2009). Or put another way, established media organizations now have free, crowd-sourced, highly relevant content to run.

In many ways, mainstream and citizen journalists are now interdependent. Citizen journalists often take part in cooperative behaviors such as centralizing mainstream information (Brodine, 2011), but also frequently criticize mass media coverage and self-consciously present correctives (Sullivan, Spicer & Bohm, 2011). Mainstream media organizations, for their part, feature growing amounts of user generated content, but still stand as gatekeepers that promote and squelch as they see fit (Kperogi, 2011).

Today's media operate not in clear-cut paradigms of traditional and alternative, but along a continuum, incorporating a blend of practices (Downing, 2001; Kenix, 2009). While there is much made over the democracy-enhancing properties of new media production—the influx of voices, the end of corporate hegemony—reality has not necessarily borne that out. Supposed alternative platforms have, when systematically scrutinized, come off as only partly so, still

indebted to the mainstream (Atton, 2002; Fremlin, 2008; Kenix, 2009). Some alternative media movements, in constant opposition to mainstream media, are hampered by an inability to go “outside” of that discursive place. Rather than offer up information as they deem appropriate, they can only counter the actions of institutional sources of journalism—thus still following that agenda and failing to set their own (Fremlin, 2008).

The need for alternative media is especially high in the case of disaster events that contain an element of social injustice, a subject on which the mainstream has traditionally fared poorly due to the exclusion of mobilizing information (Lemert, 1983; Hoffman, 2006), an apathy-inducing tendency to follow “official” accounts of disasters (Zavestoski, Agnello, Mignano, & Darroch, 2004), and failure to repair a sense of community (Houston, Pfefferbaum & Rosenholtz, 2012).

Frequent political-economic critic McChesney argues “journalism, which in theory should inspire political involvement, tends to strip politics of meaning and promote a broad depoliticization” (2002, para. 10). This sentiment has been expressed across the twentieth century, from Dewey (1927) to Habermas (1964) to Carey (1989) to Rosen (1994)—and while these intellectuals and their work come with a shared ideological bias, the argument is based in reality. Throughout U.S. history, social movements (both progressive and conservative) have therefore responded to distortion and blackouts in the mainstream media with their own alternative media serving their underrepresented interests, and without these presses, it is no exaggeration to say the movements do not occur (Stengrim, 2005).

BP has become an exemplar for corporate irresponsibility. The 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, the worst in history, left eleven dead, and three months of uncapped gushing sent 210 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico (Robertson, 2010; “On Scene Coordinator Report,”

2011). Far-reaching damages were incurred to local environments and industries, along with health issues for residents (Juhasz, 2012). Such concerns are ongoing. The U.S. government has reported finding BP, along with its operator Transocean and contractor Halliburton, at fault for business practices which left the accident a possibility (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, 2011). The accident has provoked civil and criminal federal cases against BP, including manslaughter cases for the workers killed in the explosion (Muskal, 2013). BP also paid out the largest fine in history, \$4.525 billion, and faces over 130 private lawsuits from local businesses and those harmed in the spill (Krauss, 2012).

However, BP ran an aggressive spin campaign (Rate, 2010), and as some argue, used Google to manipulate public opinion. To alter the public's perceptions, even their ability to get objective information, BP purchased search terms including "oil spill," "gulf oil," and "oil cleanup." BP's public relations site is the sponsored link for these search keywords, appearing prominently at the top of each page of search results for any of these keywords. Market research shows that many people are unable to recognize such sponsored links as paid advertisement (Rate, 2010).

The injustice of the disaster spurred thousands to protest against BP, but media coverage of these was mostly limited (Klaus, 2010). The AP did however run a story after the fact on how these affected local stations to the point that BP offered them compensation (Weber, 2010). Still, since the oil spill victims did not constitute an ongoing movement, it is likely they had trouble mobilizing and enacting the change they sought following the disaster. For instance, BP has long held up its payments to those with "legitimate claims" against them (Rate, 2010). Without a central press, the various citizen journalist platforms online are of heightened importance.

Determining these platforms' ability to hew to the ideals of alternative media will say much about their individual usefulness in this instance and going forward.

### **Objective**

The objective of this study is to measure the dimensions of alternativeness (constructed herein) of three prominent citizen journalist platforms on several scales. Content analysis will show how well CNN iReport, Indymedia, and independent blogs conform to theoretical alternative ideals on sourcing, linking, and mobilizing behaviors. In addition, these sources' ability to promote interaction and maintain a tone critical of those at fault will be gauged. This analysis will reveal which type of news service is most reliable when disaster-stricken citizens wronged by powerful entities need information. In addition, this will constitute the first examination of these hybridizing citizen soapboxes as compared against one another.

### **Rationale**

Nearly all analyses of disaster coverage only look at mainstream sources (Houston et al., 2012), while some have jumped to capture the processes surrounding social media disaster information (Bunce, Partridge & Davis, 2012; Vultee & Vultee, 2011; Poell & Borra, 2012). This is not sufficient when a disaster also becomes a social cause—alternative media platforms demand attention. A few studies have looked at the functioning of alternative media (Fremlin, 2008), but only in comparison to the mainstream and not compared against one another. None have taken on their ability to do so in the case of natural disasters.

Two of the organizations examined in this study, CNN and Indymedia, were involved in an amusing but telling exchange. When CNN ran a piece covering Indymedia's hostility toward corporate media, correspondent Brooks Jackson snidely shrugged, "Gee, that would be us," (Stengrim, 2005). Since then, scholars have recognized Indymedia's influential role in

establishing digital alternative media and offering citizens a platform on which to speak. CNN, in the meantime, launched iReport in 2006 as a citizen journalism initiative (“iReport,” 2007). The tensions inherent in emerging citizen journalist platforms call for inquiry into their ability to serve the functions of alternative media. Competing interests are morphing the alternative paradigm into new hybrids that should be systematically measured.

According to some scholars, 2010 marked a tipping point in citizen journalism in disaster reporting (Kodrich & Laituri, 2011). The BP oil spill represents a chance to look at one of the first major disasters in this new era, one with an element of social justice, and still have granted time for the story to evolve as court cases and investigations stretch out.

The elements studied best capture the alternative functions of such news. According to Carpenter (2008b), an online citizen journalist is an “individual who intends to publish information online that is meant to benefit a community” (p. 5). In this study, these benefits are explicitly gauged by measures of interaction, mobilization, and tone.

Fremlin (2008) argues that independent media must self-actualize and see themselves beyond mainstream correctives, and cannot affect change without establishing an agenda of their own. For this reason, this study takes up analysis of sourcing and linking practices among citizen journalists. Relying on official sources does nothing to undo the power relations that are channeled through mainstream outlets. Further, Warnick (1998) notes the disruptive nature of hyperlinks. Linking is important because if an alternative outlet offers links to those in the mainstream, it interrupts, diverts, or dissipates the momentum that article had built.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Hegemonic media have been handed a series of labels: establishment, legacy, and mainstream (designations usually applied in the derogatory); institutional, traditional. These terminology shifts are loaded, as they imply difference and opposition (to some alternative) in the terms themselves.

It may be impossible to form a final definition for alternative journalism, and the literature certainly struggles with this problem. However, this study hopes to operate on a working definition that is robust across changes in media and era. Alternative journalism is carried out in the public interest and requires public involvement. The ideal is therefore citizen journalists carrying out the ideals of public journalism. Practically speaking, this study's designation encompasses two qualities: serving the public (holding accountable through critical tone, providing information outside of the accepted discourse, creating a community-like forum), and fostering informational independence from institutional sources (alternative sourcing and linking).

Today's citizen journalism, as facilitated by online publishing tools, has grown out of the public journalism movement of the 1990s, as well as a longstanding intellectual tradition progressed by the likes of Jurgen Habermas and James Carey. At its root, though, citizen journalism is informed by the Deweyian perspective on journalism and society.

According to Myers (n.d.), "the public envisioned by Dewey was cognizant and activist, empowered through collective action to place its demands on the state," (2). Habermas and Carey, and those later championing public journalism, likewise center their philosophy on the

public, and all nominate a neutered public sphere as a crisis for democracy (Habermas 1964; Carey 1995; Rosen, 1994), suggesting a solution based on public discourse—one that could pass for citizen journalism.

Dewey called for social meaning in news, noting even then the process of participants becoming spectators (1927). Habermas would elaborate on this, describing the media-dominated public sphere of modern times as that in which “public opinion” is forged by experts, polls, and spectacle, while disconnected and passive citizens are buffered by entertainment (1964). Citizen journalism has since offered a potential reversal of this trend. Habermas argued that for rational debate to occur competing voices must be heard, and this deliberative public network had collapsed. It is possible citizen journalism’s popularization could reinvigorate that sphere.

Carey differentiates between news and journalism: News has historically documented daily life, while journalism is the product of a democratic society, equating the emergence of the public with that of journalism. Moreover, the news and the public exist in a dialectic relationship—news as source for debate, and subsequent account of said debate (1995). This can be seen historically: Muckraking, although soon losing out to the Lippmannian ideal depoliticized media, aimed at outraging citizens and stirring them to take social action (Carey, 1995). The new professionalized and objective journalism that followed “took the public out of politics and politics out of public life,” (1989, p. 273).

Lippmann’s breed of journalism relied on experts, which Carey (like Habermas) sees as further marginalizing the average citizen, even calling this practice undemocratic. With the news and public decoupled, both suffer. This, Carey argues, is in part due to “ruthless privatizing forces of capitalism,” (1995, pp. 373-374). Public and citizen journalism could be seen as answers to these forces, reintegrating the public independent of a corporate structure. However,

Carey does admit the success of these ventures is “local and erratic,” (1999). This serves as further motivation for determining which platforms best serve the public, as undertaken here.

Public journalism proponents see the movement as a rekindling of the Lippmann-Dewey debate, and argue that journalists must recognize their connection to society and take relevant moral stands (Rosen, 1994). Merrit (1995) calls for journalism beyond mere “information,” arguing the detachment of the traditional paradigm reduces credibility with the public. Along the same lines, he calls value-neutrality disingenuous, a “façade” which further distances the public.

All of these reframings of the role of the journalist have led up to a historical period when citizens are both technologically empowered and motivated to offer alternatives to the institutional media.

### **Citizen Journalism**

**Theory.** Looking into the theory and practice of citizen journalism allows for a fresh perspective on news values, media distortion, and news sourcing practices’ representational impact (Mythen, 2009). According to Bowman and Willis (2003), citizen journalism’s technologically aided emergence has allowed the general public to take “an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information,” (p. 2). Such journalism is commonly practiced by those close to the action as it occurs, enabled by tools such as mobile devices and wireless internet (Shankar, 2008).

Citizen journalism is often defined in relief—what it is not, and how it differs from the traditional media. The fact that institutional journalism operates within an implicit paradigm, along with its professionalization, means the range of inquiry is narrowed, certain issues left off the agenda, and some approaches not taken up (Coddington, 2012). Journalism’s paradigm, as highlighted by alternative media challenges, includes institutionality, source-based reporting



routines, and objectivity (Coddington, 2012). These contribute to the standardization of news, which is restrictive but also, on the other hand, a form of quality control.

Institutional values are transmitted in the enactment of daily news making. At journalism's core, the daily process of news is built from the reporter-source relationship (Schudson, 1989). Characterized by mutual dependence, this symbiotic relationship "opens up journalism's institutional ideology to be so fundamentally shaped by a group outside of the institution (official sources, typically within government and business) that individuals cannot fully share in the ideology while rejecting a relationship with this outside group." (Coddington, 2012, p. 381). Citizen journalism's lesser routinization and weaker associations with sources can help reporters avoid such influence.

The news value of objectivity is also problematic. Those in the media must report "events in ways that are not pre-given in the events themselves," and thus emphasize or ignore certain facets, possibly due to cultural values or limitations of language (Hackett, 1984, p. 234). Therefore, some have referred to journalistic objectivity as more a "strategic ritual" (Tuchman, 1973) meant to preempt charges of prejudice—and cast those who do not practice this routine as untrustworthy (Coddington, 2012; Schudson, 1989). Although they must answer questions of credibility, citizen journalists are less bound by paradigm and freer to address issues in situationally appropriate ways.

However, as the emergence of citizen's self-published news has been coupled with the move by global media companies to draw upon these accounts and distribute them, the information environment has become fluid. In addition to these blurred distinctions, the internet itself has become a kind of public sphere where people debate the origin and meaning of disasters (Mythen, 2009). An influx of voices and diversification of formats means the mission

guiding the citizen in news creation may not be upheld by the time it is consumed and repurposed by others.

The dimensions of this new content-class are ripe for exploration, and as such this study looks at the qualities of news on which mainstream and alternative theoretically diverge: sources, linking behavior, tone, interaction, and mobilizing information. This will shed light on whether the attempts by citizens grow out of a fertile ground for alternative practice, or have been appropriated by (or mimic) the mainstream.

Changing news habits and newly available developments in personal technology make citizen journalism of interest. As Mythen (2009) argues, citizen media needs to be understood as a part of a wider revision of hierarchical forms in media and even culture. Individuals are now engaged with and contribute to the content that was previously only consumed, resulting in what some have called “produsage,” or “prosumption” (Bruns, 2007; Tapscott & Williams, 2007).

Linked with this more-public involvement, citizen journalism is theorized to be most revolutionary in terms of gate-keeping. Ideally, anyone can upload and transmit any message they choose, thus circumventing those in the institutional media who have served the roles of filter (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Goode, 2009; Lewis, Kaufold, & Lasorsa, 2010; Tilley & Cokley, 2008). The current news environment is distinct from prior historical periods by the degree of input available to the public (Rosen, 2006). As such, open source user generated sites like *Indymedia* and *Newsvine* take this populist ideal as their operating model (Mythen, 2009; Tapscott & Williams, 2007). Ideally, this means the discourses surrounding disasters can become more plural, agendas differing from those pursued in the mainstream are provided, and the “political and cultural logics” at the root of the event are given question (Mythen, 2009, p. 49).

**Practice.** Citizen news’ distinction from traditional news reflects not just philosophical divergence and technical opportunity, but differing approaches. In contrast to the objective, by-the-book writing of professionals, citizen journalism is more likely to host the emotional process—from outrage to grieving (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Mythen 2009). Citizen journalism differs from that produced by professionals in more subtle ways, too. Due to fear of libel charges, mainstream journalists habitually fall back on official definitions of disasters while citizens are relatively less restricted and routinized (Mythen, 2009). Thus, while professionals produce “black and white” reports, citizens may probe the grey areas and stimulate otherwise stifled debate (Dvorkin, 2007; Mythen 2009).

Reich (2008) details the practices of citizen newsmakers by using the theory of “news access,” arguing citizen journalists are hindered by inferior contacts. Their lesser resources result in greater reliance on single-source stories. Additionally, the tendency for citizen journalist to be unwilling to negotiate versions of stories with sources leads to more “ad hoc” relationships. However, they are more intrinsically motivated and likely to pursue stories on their own accord, as well as base a story around first-person witnessing, technical sources like the Internet, or from personal contacts (Reich, 2008).

Carpenter (2008a) likewise examined the difference in the way citizen journalist publications and online newspapers employ objectivity and external sources. Citing Shoemaker and Reese’s hierarchy of influence, the author traces the effect of routines on news output. Traditional sources, relying on routine more than citizen journalists, were found to produce less diverse content. Online newspapers also look more to external sources, while citizen journalists used unofficial sources and opinion more often. In general, then, the publication type engenders content reflecting organizational routines.

There is also the dubious side of citizen journalism. Despite democratic rhetoric, there are still questions of unequal access, in regard to technology and leisure time (Brodine, 2011; Maher, 2007). There is also the presence of unregulated bias, distortion, sensationalism and low credibility (Mythen, 2009). The promise of eliminating the editor acting as gatekeeper to information is questioned by some, since ratings systems and search engine algorithms have a role in steering news seekers toward content. And of course, citizen accounts can be “reframed and repackaged by multinational media conglomerations” (Mythen, 2009, p. 52).

Likewise, the preponderance of shocking or gruesome disaster images has likely been amplified and not curtailed in online citizen journalism (Meyer, 2007). Also, the fact that citizen journalists can get the story out on-location may only deepen the mainstream’s tendency to skimp on contextualization, especially in disasters, where event-oriented and eye-witness approaches dominate (Mythen, 2009). At the same time, though, citizen news—motivated to reach an audience felt ignored on the hyperlocal level (Carpenter, 2008b)—can parlay its unique embedded position to promote a community’s resilience while helping to redefine its identity (Meyer, 2007). This is a function at which the mass media have proven inadequate (Houston et al, 2012).

**Functions.** The consequences of these divergent methods of gathering and producing news manifest in different output. As mentioned, online citizen journalism is likely to feature more diverse topics than traditional online newspapers, as well as more information from outside sources, and multimedia or interactivity (Carpenter, 2010). Thus citizen journalism adds variety to the information marketplace.

Along these lines, citizen journalism has been found to serve as a complement to newspapers. Lacy, Watson & Rife (2011) analyzed the content of citizen blogs, citizen news

sites, and daily newspapers to find that citizen news of both types differed significantly from the newspapers'. Comparing locally oriented citizen sites to traditional sites, Viall (2009) found a similar level of political news, but more opinion content with local sources. These outlets were also found to be more concerned with fulfilling a watchdog function, especially for local governments. Some have made the claim that alternative news outlets and public affairs blogs may serve as a *substitute* for mainstream news, depending on the local media environment (Lacy et al., 2011). It is clear the new wave of newsmakers serve functions the old guard does not. However, it is less certain whether this represents a true alternative.

As such it is currently unclear whether disaster coverage coming from citizens functions as an extension of the mainstream, or something more unconventional. Regardless of its classification, though, this type of output serves important roles for individuals, communities, and society. Inquiry into Australian social media in times of disaster revealed that the public leans on a mix of both official and informal sources, using social media to repost government links, in effect acting as a filter and megaphone for "official" information (Taylor, Wells, Howell & Raphael, 2012). The timeliness and built-in connections afforded by social networks allow them to contribute to "psychological first aid" and communities' resilience.

There are many examples of citizen journalism's contributions to society, beyond the litany of positive findings for journalism in general. Besides the normative good of adding to content diversity, its consumption is correlated with higher levels of on- and offline political participation (Kaufold, Valenzuela, & De Zuniga, 2010). The voice of local residents as disseminated over citizen media channels might be especially important in the case of disasters. As Kelman, Mercer, and Gaillard (2012) argue, indigenous knowledge may be more useful than given credit for in such instances, as it can help reduce disasters' risks and impacts, and so

multiple knowledge forms should be present in the information environment. Given the right tools, locals can help minimize damages in ways mass media cannot.

Social media and user generated content pertaining to crises demand attention now, as they constitute a new norm. An investigation of the Giffords shooting in Tucson found TV reporters were more likely to use unofficial and citizen-generated content than web-based official statements (Wigley & Fontenot, 2011). For students, citizen journalism is just as credible as professional, according to Netzely and Hemmer (2012). Students didn't differentiate among author type, and usually did not care about professional norms in content. This could mark a shift in attitudes; similarly, Siff, Hrach, and Alost (2008) found that source (professional or user-generated) was not important when readers gauged fairness, believability, or quality of opinion pieces online.

Whether this phenomenon is "alternative" or not, it calls for further study. If it in fact proves to be, it may serve as a gateway to a more full-throated and more attended-to information source.

**'Alt', or Not?** The speed with which online citizen journalism is able to respond to crises may allow it to alter the way stories are framed. RimoftheWorld.net, a citizen journalist website, was the first communicator for the 2007 California wildfires and thus had a significant impact on subsequent media coverage (Novak & Vidoloff, 2011). This element of timeliness can amplify citizens' coverage of disasters more so than it would that of, say, politics, where their contribution is not a crucial and singular piece of information on which organizations and individuals depend.

Moreover, user news is everywhere: CNN has iReport, Fox has uReport, and ABC has i-CAUGHT. Footage captured by average citizens is commonly presented by mainstream outlets.

(Sniadak, 2012). Kperogi (2011) argues, however, that while the literature constructs user generated content as the innate polar opposite of mainstream, and while it does possess such counter-hegemonic potential, we are seeing an aggressive movement by those media hegemonies to co-opt citizen media. We may therefore see a blurrier distinction between them.

Indeed, many news organizations think of online user participation in terms of user-to-user current events debates (presumably in radioactive comments sections), while other areas of news production are off-limits (Domingo et al., 2008). This is hardly community-driven news. Even outlets which solicit and utilize user-generated content such as video and articles tend to minimize the role of those contributors. Williams, Wardle, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2011) write that rather than altering the newsgathering practices of the BBC, user-generated content is being used, and situated, in long-standing routines of traditional journalism—essentially, it is not opening up any alternative discursive space, but being exploited as the means to old ends. Tellingly, Williams et al. titled their article ““Have They Got News for Us?””

CNN describes vetting as the “core” of iReport (King, 2012). Eight full-time producers work to vet approximately 8% of all user-generated content on the site, approving them for on-air or main site inclusion. Citizens’ reports often become quotes in broader stories, or additional sources or perspectives are incorporated to “balance” the story, since most iReports come from those “at the heart of the story,” (King, 2012, p. 18). In the interests of institutional journalism, citizen news sponsored by iReport seems to be tempered—at least in 8% of the cases.

Alternative voices are not only marginalized by mainstream institutions, but from within-ranks. Brodine (2011) argues that the emergence of blogging, citizen media, and other online “counterpublics” is more problematic than the democratic ideal posited in early literature. In an ethnography of post-Katrina “NOLA” blogs, she concludes that through the practice of linking,

practitioners of this format conduct a type of “peer review” which grants credibility to some and thus diminishes the impact of other citizens taking up the same topic and publishing tools.

This brings into question citizen media’s “alternative” functionality. According to Brodine, some of the NOLA bloggers saw their role as oppositional, some as supplemental to the mainstream. Since they painted the big media as disconnected and slow to capture the big picture of New Orleans’ devastation, some felt the need to continue offering coverage after the mainstream had lost interest, due to the long recovery ahead for the affected communities (it should be noted that outstanding Katrina coverage by the mainstream press has been rewarded with a number of Pulitzer Prizes—bloggers’ claims are far from indisputable).

Bloggers and other citizen news makers commonly exert their utility in terms of embeddedness within their community, and in the “authenticity” their format allows, contrasted to the impersonality of conglomerates. Meanwhile, their blogs serve to centralize information from various (major) outlets, yet regularly act as media critic. At the same time, considering the linking behavior Brodine mentions, citizen journalists show tendencies to form coalitions along ideological lines, so in this way may be just as informationally-obstructionist as the institutional media they criticize. The following section examines the position of the blog, specifically, relative to the mainstream and alternative paradigms.

### **Fitting in with Mainstream and Alternative Paradigms**

**Blogs.** While noting there are ideological forces at play in mainstream journalism, alongside institutional norms and practices such as the commitment to objectivity, Kenix (2009) points out that mainstream and alternative media ought not to be conceptualized binarily—rather, their practices and output are better understood on a continuum. However, there are certain tendencies to each. The mainstream media tend to focus on institutions over movements



(Downing, 2001), and also utilize a “hierarchy of access” (Atton, 2002) that privileges sources based on standing perceptions of credibility. Blogs are in part defined by their subjectivity (Wall, 2005) and are also capable of offering a greater range of voices from nonprofessional commentators than are the mass media. However, many studies also point to blogs’ preservation of traditional media norms (Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun & Jeong, 2007), particularly reliance on official sources and mainstream news links in current events, war and political coverage (Kenix 2009; Wall, 2005). There is evidence of a strong if critical relationship with mainstream media.

Blogs (or web logs) are distinguished as a format, genre, or publishing tool. Generally, a blog is a regularly updated, single-subject online journal presented in a reverse-chronological order (Barret, 2002; Messner, 2009). They are noted for hyperlinking and usually allow users’ comments to be displayed below posts (Tynan, 2004). Stylistically, blogs tend to be informal, personalized, even intimate (Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005; Gupta & Pitt, 2004). They tend to be written by a single author, but not exclusively (Messner, 2009).

The new media form has experienced an explosion in use: In 1999, roughly 50 populated the internet (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard & Wong, 2007). In 2006, 57 million American internet users (29%) had accessed blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006), and by 2007 that number reached nearly half of internet users (Synovate, 2007). This dramatic rise is due in part to their dynamic value, as they often feature hourly updates, links to important information, and audience interactivity (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Kenix 2009).

User-friendly blogging software like Blogger has allowed even less technically skilled citizens to publish news on an internationally-available scale (Blood, 2002). While some practitioners have taken their blog toward mainstream ideals of objectivity, “most blogs continue to remain firmly rooted in personal disclosure,” (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). However, the linking

tendency of blogs presents the well-covered danger of “echo-chambers” (Kumar, Raghavan, Rajagopalan, & Tomkins, 1999) or “cyber ghettos” (Johnson, Bichard, & Zhang, 2009) that could limit the spectrum of distinct voices heard in a particular realm of coverage.

So, the blog format is recognized as neither cure-all nor blight. This is partly due to the cloudiness surrounding the term in general: scholars have failed to come to a consensus definition of “blog,” (Thompson, 2003). Further muddying the waters, mainstream entities have taken up the form as well, from *The New York Times* on down to local papers (see Garden, 2010). This study looks at those blogs run by individuals unconnected to other media outlets, which come closest to embodying a “citizen” ethic. Still, there are mixed outcomes for even this subset. While free from advertising pressures and other institutional constraints, these blogs may nevertheless be home to fierce judgments, strong ideology and even retributive authors’ verbal wrath (Johnson & Kaye, 2004).

One may question the logic in using “blog” as a category of analysis when its definition(s) are amorphous. This study does so due to some key differences between the blogs and the other formats under investigation: These blogs exist for a single purpose (oil spill coverage) instead of ongoing general news, and their content is published by a single author instead of by collaborating strangers.

Regardless of the previous arguments, many argue that blogs represent a clear departure from the type of discourse in the mainstream media (Haas, 2005). According to Kenix, this “radical” shift toward a media that is “alternative” and “activist” is possible due to three key affordances of the blog: an ability to steer the mass media conversation (see Fielder, 2008; Messner & Garrison, 2011); independent reporting not conducted in a corporate shadow, with a greater range of coverage; and uncensored critique paired with original mainstream source

material (Kenix, 2009). Blogs are also set apart by their likelihood of inviting readers into the conversation (Wall, 2005). Motivations for blogging are numerous: hobby (Pedersen & Macafee, 2007), self-documentation (Li, 2007), personal expression and self disclosure (Papacharissi, 2004) are commonly cited. Most importantly, unlike newspaper reporters, bloggers are more often motivated by intrinsic rewards (Liao et al, 2011). Taking these elements into account, there is obviously great potential to nurture a media form that offers a real choice for news consumers.

Kenix's analysis of political blogs, in particular, reveals that they appear to fall short of the alternative media "ideal" developed by scholars such as Downing (2001). Rather than a discursive space in opposition to the mainstream, politics blogs "exist as somewhat of an overlapping sphere between mainstream and alternative media, extending and drawing upon mainstream practices just without corporate sponsorship, and at times, with a personal voice," (Kenix, 2009, p. 814). This evaluation rejects "binarism" as Downing recommends, and sees media along a continuum. Indeed, alternative media borrow and transform practices of the mainstream, while their big media foils borrow right back (Kenix, 2009).

Finally, it must be noted that while the literature on blogs point to the above mentioned behaviors, other blogs hypothetically operate differently—there are no rules, only observed patterns. While the format was initially an alternative technology, blogs' authors do not necessarily operate by alternative philosophies (Kenix, 2009). There are types of "alternativeness" that blogs fail to reliably achieve, such as independence from mainstream spheres of influence. Different platforms are more alternative in some aspects than others—there are inherent strengths and weaknesses.

**iReport.** Though there has been no in-depth analysis of CNN's user news forum, it is plausible that its content would lean toward mainstream values and execution (Kperogi, 2011).

Because CNN enacts a vetting process to decide which stories will be highlighted for readers, the gate keeping function should be intact. Although it gives citizens a chance at accessing a wider audience, those opportunities are still dictated, and that which is selected must conform to CNN's organizational standards of newsworthiness (Williams et al., 2011).

Moreover, it is likely that as a commercial outlet CNN would be hesitant to promote stories with links taking their readers anywhere off-site, let alone to alternative outlets. According to the analysis of Chang, Himelboim, and Dong (2009), online journalism operates within more of a "closed media code" than an open one: news flows as situated in outgoing hyperlinks are mostly stopped up.

Additionally, just like others in the mainstream, they tend to protect against legal liability and anything that would mar their public image, and so would probably exclude stories containing controversial mobilizing information or especially strident criticism (Fitt, 2011). Hypothetically, citizen media sponsored by a mainstream outlet would be less alternative than that on other platforms.

**Indymedia.** Indymedia, an open-publishing platform, represents a more complicated case. Although alternative in conception and mission, this may paradoxically thwart its ability to operate free of mainstream influence. From their slogan "Be the media," onward, Indymedia is committed to activist and radical values (Pickard, 2006). In interviews of both corporate news teams and Indymedia editorial groups, Platon and Dueze (2003) find that though they may face similar challenges, their solutions are based on "radically" different ideologies of journalism. Most crucially, according to Sullivan, Spicer, and Bohm (2011), "Indymedia has established and maintained itself as a counter-hegemonic media-producing organization... [through]...a

conscious positioning and self-identification as counter-hegemonic,” (p. 703). This self-conscious countering impedes Indymedia’s ability to operate free of mainstream influence.

Of course, since being founded in 1999 to contest the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, Indymedia has been openly opposed to the mainstream, with a focus on social justice (Milberry & Milberry, 2003). However, as the mainstream and those who oppose it tend to offer different viewpoints on the same topic (Roush, 2003), the agendas set by both mainstream outlets and Indymedia have been found to not vary significantly (Fremlin, 2008). For the independent media to affect social change, they must see themselves as their own entity “and not a place for opposing viewpoints to the existing media agenda,” (p. 62).

Indymedia’s relationship to the mainstream is examined by Atton (2002) who documents the new site’s complex and shifting news values. Atton claims that while some activist publications place premiums on the same standards of sourcing and language as the mass media (to the point that their work may be readily plagiarized by them, as was the case in 1998 for the UK activist newspaper *Squall*), Indymedia’s partisan first-person accounts are more in line with privileged senior reporters and columnists. This style, in the mainstream, is one reserved for high-status contributors. For Indymedia it is radicalized, with low-access reporters buoyed by open publishing practices.

But in sourcing practices Indymedia goes far beyond native reporting. Atton calls the approach “hybridized,” referencing linking to “exiled” independent radio stations’ content produced under mainstream values and professional routines. For its 9/11 coverage, Indymedia further moved from its open model, with the original collective in Seattle selecting stories from various sources for inclusion in the site’s package. Atton notes a preponderance of elite sources among these. Mainstream and official sources were also identified in this coverage package, with

links to the BBC, CNN and *The Los Angeles Times*—even if these were chosen to highlight critique of US policy among the mass media. Atton says this may be surprising, but only if one does not realize the “pluralism” of Indymedia’s approach, which does not strive for “purity” in its sources; it does, however, prove to maintain an ideological focus in their deployment.

Reports of protest events on Indymedia in its formative stages “were considered newsworthy by independent journalists to the degree that they were able to counter the dominant mainstream coverage” (p. 13). This highlights Indymedia’s built-in ties to the mainstream. Those reports were legitimized by the position of their authors as participants, while the approaches taken by the site since then may downplay native reporting in favor of less “purely” alternative styles of newsmaking—but ones they see as more important. This problematizes all Indymedia’s defining alternative characteristics: horizontality, openness, inclusion. Atton does, however, consider this hybridity a show of flexibility and an “evolution” from prior conceptualizations of alternative media.

Stengrim (2005) argues that those who created Indymedia engaged in a playful Lyotardian language game wherein they appropriate the feigned neutrality of the corporate media for their anti-corporate news site. Contrary to its known motives, Indymedia downplays its politicized nature throughout the site, claiming not to be a “conscious mouthpiece.” Even the site design, Stengrim argues, mimics a corporate design. In the end, this is a “postmodern resistance,” through which “Indymedia re-appropriates the technologies, discourses, and journalistic tactics of corporate mass media to launch a grassroots movement against it” (p. 292). Indymedia appears locked in a binary antagonism, but it may be feeding the beast.

One can expect the shadow of mainstream news to hang over Indymedia, but it displays many other behaviors of an alternative medium. Noting increased traffic to its servers during the

months leading to and immediately following the U.S invasion of Iraq in early 2003, Opel and Templin (2004) suggest a link between Indymedia and mobilization. Stengrim (2005) also found during a protest that the newswire of the Miami site served more as a “clearinghouse” for fragments of on-the-ground mobilizing information, rather than summaries for those outside the frontlines.

Additionally, a survey of Australian Indymedia users found “Indymedia users view the website as an example of community media, wherein their perspectives and opinions are valued and accepted,” (Saunders, 2004, p. 1). These may be the prefigurative attitudes needed to bolster interaction both among readers and between authors and audience.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Blogs and other forms of alternative media are noted for their emphasis on personalization, though this goes beyond ego gratification; as Atton and Wickendon (2005) argue, news is best realized through “the community itself.” As Atton (2002) states, the objectives of alternative media include subversion of the above-mentioned “hierarchy of access” which dominates the mainstream. Using first-person accounts or “native reporting,” personal blogs and alternative sites like Indymedia.org create a more populist form of media (Allan 2003; Atton, 2002; Kenix, 2009; Platon & Deuze, 2003). These types of media use unofficial sources (often bystanders, or even the author) more so than official voices as relayed by the mainstream (Harcup, 2003). Moreover, alternative media encourage social criticism while their counterparts omit such activism (Makagon, 2000). Alternative news, then, is more likely to take a critical tone.

Related to sourcing behavior, the use of hyperlinks in citizen media is also of interest. That which hews closest to alternative ideals would not only provide information itself in challenge to dominant representations, but also link frequently to other voices on the periphery

of the mainstream. Rather than strengthen the presence of corporate media (serving as a “secondary market” for such content [Reese, et al., 2007, p. 257]), such journalism would empower other outsiders and help create a separate discursive space. Kenix (2009) found most political bloggers failed to do this. With these arguments in mind, this study hypothesizes:

**H1: Indymedia most consistently employ alternative sources rather than institutional ones, followed by independent blogs and then iReport.**

**H2: Independent blogs and Indymedia more consistently link to sources outside of the mainstream than do citizen journalists publishing on as iReporters.**

**H3: Indymedia and independent blogs take a more critical tone toward governmental or corporate actors than does iReport.**

This study also inquires about mobilizing information. Crucial to efforts of social action, mainstream sources typically avoid its inclusion for fear of controversy or legal ramifications. Alternative sources, however, largely exist to challenge institutions. Therefore, alternative sources are in large part characterized by their promotion of mobilization. With iReport’s place within the mainstream CNN brand, this study hypothesizes:

**H4: Independent blogs and Indymedia include mobilizing information at the highest rates, with iReport registering the lowest levels.**

In addition, this study poses the question:

**R1: Does mobilizing information-type vary by platform? (For example, do blogs include higher rates of locational MI, while Indymedia favors tactical MI?)**

Another element that contributes to the creation of an alternative media is engagement. As Mythen (2009) explains, citizen journalism can advantageously complement the mainstream by playing host to a discursive forum, which allows users to discuss, deliberate, and make



meaning of disasters and other crises. Since these media are in part defined by authors and readers engaging in dialogue, this study asks:

**RQ2: Which platform includes the highest incidence of author/reader interaction?**

Lastly, as alternative media should add informational diversity to the marketplace and serve as an outlet for marginalized views and skepticism of society's institutions, this study examined "truth claims." Addressing direct challenges to mainstream reports, this study posits:

**H5: Indymedia is most likely to host direct challenges to mainstream versions in the form of "truth claims," followed by blogs, and then CNN.**

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

Inquiring into the coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010, this study uses quantitative content analysis to investigate the characteristics of disaster news produced by citizens across varying platform alignments—corporate-sanctioned (CNN’s iReport), alternative-minded (Indymedia.org), and the two most prominent event-centered standalone blogs by traffic ranking (bpoilslick.blogspot, gulfoilspill.blogspot). In doing so, it determines which content platform best supports journalism that is alternative to the mainstream. This is resolved by analyzing news stories’ tone, sourcing, linking behavior, interaction with readers, and inclusion of mobilizing information.

The study examines all topical stories published by each outlet. For the two oil spill-themed blogs, this simply means analyzing each entry. For the user-generated news site CNN iReport, all *vett*ed stories only, organized under the CNN “assignment: track the oil disaster” were included, while Indymedia stories were delimited by the search terms “Deepwater Horizon” and “BP Oil,” the latter intended to catch protest mobilization following the spill. The range of stories included any published between April 20, 2010, and March 9, 2013. This resulted in a total of 1,566 news stories among BPOilSlick.blogspot ( $N = 457$ ), GulfOilSpill.blogspot ( $N = 781$ ), CNN iReport ( $N = 250$ ), and Indymedia ( $N = 78$ ). Articles were coded by a single coder during May, June and July 2013.

#### Sourcing

One of the defining distinctions between mainstream and alternative news, sourcing is of high interest in an analysis of citizen journalism outlets. This study coded the number of both institutional (government, corporate, established media, or other traditional organizations) and

unofficial sources (local residents, eyewitnesses, social movement organizations, and other non-authoritative sources). A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to determine the variation in use of alternative sources across platform, holding total sources constant. Post hoc tests then illustrated differences in means among outlets.

Beyond this, the study coded expert and counter-expert sources, since the spill spurred scientific debate; those being sourced may be used to challenge the mainstream storylines, but are also not necessarily “alternative sources.” For the purposes of this study, an expert is someone who cited as especially knowledgeable in their field, with such authority bestowed by advanced degree, publications, current or former office or specialized employment, and so on. Meanwhile, a counter expert is defined as someone cited in contestation of an authority’s claim, attributed to as another source with reference to title or affiliation which grants some other form of authority – scientific, academic, legal, professional, etc. These expert and counter-expert variables serve as supplements to those which correspond directly to the sourcing hypothesis. This analysis will elaborate not only which outlets produce stories citing those who stand in contrast to dominant representations, but also a finer-grained view of that behavior.

## **Linking**

In the digital realm, linking can be thought of as an extension of sourcing. The sites a new story links to reveal much about its association with, reliance on, and relationships to mainstream and alternative news. Kenix (2009) found posts in the political blogosphere linked mainly to mainstream sources, whether to reference or criticize, and thus constituted not a separate discursive space but one operating in tandem. Others have noted that some citizen disaster portals serve similar roles (Brodine, 2011), and also tend to aggregate disaster information sources as a helpful service to afflicted parties. However, the ideal alternative

journalism source will link frequently to other alternative spaces, and offer news consumers choices different than the ones already highly accessible and pervasive in society.

This study quantifies linking behavior as it does sourcing. The presence of alternative links (to non-mainstream media, independent blogs and websites, advocacy groups), contextualized against mainstream or institutional media links (e.g., all television networks, national and regional newspapers, and national news magazines) through a one-way ANCOVA and subsequent pairwise comparisons. Non-news links (e.g., scientific institutes, universities, commercial websites, government organizations) were coded as well. Finally, links to mainstream sites were noted as informational or critical.

### **Interaction**

Blogs and other forms of potentially alternative media are often cited for interactivity between authors and readers (Wall, 2005), which transcends the paradigm of traditional journalism (although technology is changing this dynamic for established media, too). When a journalist truly engages with their audience, it represents a new mode of communication, dialogic instead of simply monologic. Additionally, Mythen (2009) argues that citizen journalism stands as a complement to mainstream news in the creation and hosting of discursive forums centered on meaningful disasters. However, Kenix (2009) found that the majority of political bloggers refrained from participating in their comments sections, and if they did, it was to silence critics instead of motivating conversation or soliciting further opinion.

This study therefore measures interaction to determine which platform encourages the most robust author-reader relationship, and is most likely to serve as a vigorous forum for readers. This is done through two variables. The first, measuring each source's ability to stimulate conversation, is the total number of comments per story. The second, addressing the

involvement of the author, counts their explicit connections to readers in feedback—in terms of inviting email, references to readers in posts, and responding to comments.

### **Mobilizing Information**

Mobilizing information, or MI, is crucial in disaster coverage—both in early phases, when danger may be present or direct action prudent, and later, when citizens may need to mobilize to seek reparation from responsible parties. Online, it most often takes the form of contact information or links (Hoffman, 2006). It enables citizens to take action by providing the necessary details, since these are not readily available outside the media (Rubin & Sachs, 1971).

MI pioneer Lemert (1981) defines three types of mobilizing information: *locational*, giving specifics about time and place of proceedings such as a protest, rally, vote or media event; *identificational*, providing contact information and names for individuals, groups and organizations; and *tactical*, which offers instructions for actual behaviors such as those used during a strike. Lemert argues that since many of these could be controversial, the mainstream media avoid an endorsement of participation. Hoffman (2006) found negligible difference between print and online journalism's inclusion of such content.

Institutional framing shapes media frames of certain disasters' hazard (stemming from media reliance on official versions), so there may be a causal link between this influence and lack of mobilization—inducing “citizen apathy” even when local environments are compromised (Zavestoski, Agnello, Mignano & Darroch, 2004). Promoting activism is one of the primary behaviors separating alternative and mainstream outlets (Makagon, 2000), and Carpenter (2008b) found higher rates of MI in citizen journalism than in traditional. Therefore, this study examines the presence of MI in citizen journalism. Each unit of analysis was coded for contents of each MI type.

## Tone

Tone was examined on an interval scale for a more fine-grained assessment, since hypothetically much of the coverage is critical of BP and/or government authorities. Following the Hurricane Katrina media analysis of Brunken (2006), this study adapts Pfau, Haigh, Gettle, Donnelly, Scott, Warr, and Witenberg (2004) in the use of seven-interval semantic differential scales. The first scale is intended to measure the valence of assessments of *ability* to address the disaster.

This means getting residents and the environment back on their feet and free from distress. Therefore this measure refers not just to judgments of the tackling of technical problems but social and environmental. A news story warranting a (1) on this scale includes high praise of BP or government officials, and/or un-tempered optimism. A (2) applies to a story with specific positive comments on efforts or handling of the disaster, and not necessarily an overall blanket commendation. A (3) would be appropriate for an article in which success in the restoration is deemed an eventual probability; with time, the current plans and efforts are said to win out. A (4) applies to stories neutral on the ability of those responsible. A (5) applies to general, mild pessimism regarding the task; this includes references to not getting the job done in a timely or satisfactory manner. A (6) was coded for specific doubts, and/or highlighting incidents which are intended to show proof of inability. A (7) was reserved for strong, pervasive criticism, complete lack of faith, and those who declared success impossible.

The second scale measured the valence of journalists' takes on BP or government officials' intentions. Initial review of the sample revealed a focus on not just ability, but *intent*. A (1) was coded for those which described their intent as fully benevolent, making every effort, and going above and beyond to restore the Gulf and make residents whole following the disaster.

A (2) was used for assessments that deemed they were working hard (e.g., through the night), or doing their best (e.g., overcoming obstacles)—but short of the positivity warranting a (1). A (3) was used when authors deemed that BP was making an effort beyond inaction, but were parsimonious with praise. A (4) refers to a neutral assessment of intent. This study employed a (5) rating when authors described BP or government employees as indifferent to pressing conditions or uncaring toward those affected. A (6) was coded for news stories which called the actors criminally negligent, self-concerned or profit-motivated, or charged them with ignoring potential solutions. For the most negative assessments of intent, a (7) was reserved for those which accused malicious, obstructionist, conspiratorial, or deceptive intent.

Ability may refer to not only successfulness, but also the speed, efficiency, intelligence, discretion, preparedness, and reliability with which BP or the government acted. Intent may refer to characterizations ranging from benevolent to disingenuous, altruistic to sociopathic, truthful to deceitful, humane to inhumane, charitable to greedy, caring to uncaring, philanthropic to politically-driven, and doing their best to dragging their feet. In using these descriptive tones, this study will capture more than the standard positive, neutral or negative assessments of news coverage. The analysis hopefully will yield more descriptive and accurate measurement of each source's use of tone, and therefore be of more use in determining the alternativeness of each.

### **Contested Truth**

The final variable measures direct, explicit claims of information which challenges mainstream narratives. This is made evident by the presence of two things: the “outsider” knowledge itself, and necessarily a claim of falseness for that which it confronts. Any article with “truth claims,” made in the face of supposed ignorance, suppression or complicity, is thusly coded with presence of this a binary variable.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

H1 stated Indymedia most consistently relies on alternative rather than institutional sources, followed by blogs and then CNN's iReports. A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with news platform as the independent variable, alternative sources per article as the dependent variable, and total sources per article as the covariate. The ANCOVA showed platform was still a significant factor after accounting for the effect of total sources,  $F(3, 1561) 27.93, p = .000$ .

With total sources held constant at 1.91, the estimated marginal means for alternative sources were CNN  $M = 1.20$ , Indymedia  $M = 1.13$ , BPOilSlick  $M = .99$ , and GulfOilSpill  $M = .67$ . Sidak post hoc comparisons showed CNN's adjusted alternative sources mean to be significantly greater than BPOilSlick's ( $p = .001$ ) and GulfOilSpill's ( $p = .000$ ), while insignificantly greater than Indymedia's ( $p = .995$ ). Indymedia's was significantly greater than GulfOil's ( $p = .000$ ), and insignificantly greater than BPOilSlick's ( $p = .304$ ). BPOilSlick's was also significantly greater than GulfOilSpill's ( $p = .000$ ). CNN's position in these means comparisons conflicts with the hypothesis. Indymedia, however, scored highly as predicted.

Similar sourcing patterns continued with experts and counter-experts. For expert sources, a Tukey's HSD shows Indymedia ( $M = .44, SD = 1.09$ ) and BPOilSlick ( $M = .30, SD = 1.02$ ) as a homogenous subset were significantly greater than the subset of GulfOilSpill ( $M = .08, SD = .35$ ) and CNN ( $M = .04, SD = .20$ ). Meanwhile, counter-expert sources were employed most by Indymedia ( $M = 1.14, SD = 2.07$ ), significantly more than BPOilSlick ( $M = .26, SD = .82$ ), which was itself significantly greater than the usage of CNN ( $M = .04, SD = .23$ ) and



GulfOilSpill ( $M = .03$ ,  $SD = .25$ ). All Tukey means-differences for all variables were found significant at the  $p > .001$  level unless otherwise noted; see Table 8 for details.

While not factored into the ratio formulated to test the hypothesis, these measures of expert deference provide further evidence of patterns in sourcing. Indymedia led all source categories—alternative, institutional, expert and counter-expert—in raw totals, while the blogs were split in their behavior, with one appearing to emulate more closely the Indymedia style and the other less inclined to alternative sources and counter-experts—GulfOilSpill was the only platform with an institutional-source majority.

For link variables, H2 conjectured that alternative linking would be most consistent among blogs and Indymedia, with CNN iReports at lower levels. A one-way ANCOVA was conducted with news platform as the independent variable, alternative links per article as the dependent variable, and total links per article as the covariate. The ANCOVA was significant,  $F(3, 1561) 20.34, p = .000$ .

With total links held constant at 1.42, the estimated marginal means for alternative links were CNN  $M = .91$ , Indymedia  $M = 1.45$ , BPOilSlick  $M = .80$ , and GulfOilSpill  $M = .55$ . Sidak post hoc comparisons showed Indymedia's alternative link mean was significantly greater than the other three platforms' ( $p = .000$  for all). CNN's, while insignificantly greater than BPOilSlick's ( $p = .760$ ), was significantly greater than GulfOil's ( $p = .000$ ). BPOilSlick's was also significantly greater than GulfOilSpill's ( $p = .002$ ). Thus H2 was partially confirmed, with Indymedia leading the other platforms; CNN's results were somewhat unexpected, though.

This study also noted whether such links were included informatively or critically. Surprisingly, the practice of criticizing and linking to source material was rare, especially among blogs, where the activity was originally noted in the literature (Brodine, 2011). Four Indymedia

articles (29%), one iReport (20%), five BPOilSlick posts (3%), and zero GulfOilSpill posts that included mainstream links did so critically. Non-news links (universities, government organizations, scientific foundations, commercial/trade websites etc.) were also recorded; see Table 8 for these results.

H3 posited that Indymedia and independent blogs' news stories would take a harsher and more accusatory stance toward BP, government actors, and others at fault. Measured on seven-point scales (with higher ratings indicating more negative tone), the analysis bore this out. As a one-way ANOVA indicated, both the Ability and Intent scales differed in a statistically significant manner among the platforms ( $F(3, 1562) 88.50, p = .000$ ;  $F(3, 1562) 87.02, p = .000$ ).

A post hoc Tukey's HSD test revealed Indymedia employing tones significantly more punitive than those of other outlets. For both Ability ( $M = 5.77, SD = 1.33$ ) and Intent ( $M = 5.74, SD = 1.23$ ), this news source used tones significantly more negative. BPOilSlick (Ability:  $M = 5.07, SD = 1.28$ ; Intent:  $M = 4.81, SD = 1.23$ ), the second harshest on average, was significantly more so than the two remaining platforms. CNN and GulfOilSpill comprised a homogenous subset for both scales, flipping position but varying insignificantly: for CNN – Ability  $M = 4.54, SD = 1.07$  and Intent  $M = 4.18, SD = 1.00$ ; for GulfOilSpill – Ability  $M = 4.32, SD = .76$  and Intent  $M = 4.19, SD = .67$ . Thus, H4 was largely confirmed, excepting that GulfOilSpill again displayed less alternative values than the other blog examined.

H4 regarded the inclusion of three types of mobilizing information: identificational, locational, and tactical, presuming that independent blogs and Indymedia include mobilizing information at the highest rates, with iReport registering the lowest levels. These variables were coded as binary, so means also represent percent of articles including such information. A one-way ANOVA was conducted for each type, showing statistically significant difference for each:

Identificational  $F(3, 1562) 14.81, p = .000$ ; Locational  $F(3, 1562) 3.04, p = .028$ ; and Tactical  $F(3, 1562) 14.10, p = .000$ . Tukey's HSD tests were performed post hoc. For identificational MI, the BPOilSlick blog ( $M = .12, SD = .32$ ) was shown to include significantly more than a homogenous subset including CNN ( $M = .04, SD = .01$ ) and GulfOilSpill ( $M = .03, SD = .17$ ), with Indymedia ( $M = .09, SD = .29$ ) not varying significantly from either, existing somewhere in between.

Indymedia ( $M = .05, SD = .22$ ) included more locational MI than GulfOilSpill ( $M = .01, SD = .10$ ), while BPOilSlick ( $M = .03, SD = .16$ ) and CNN ( $M = .02, SD = .14$ ) did not vary significantly from either in inclusion likelihood. The means-differences for locational MI were not found to be significant. For tactical MI, Indymedia ( $M = .10, SD = .31$ ) and BPOilSlick ( $M = .07, SD = .26$ ) as a homogenous subset included significantly more of such instructions than did the subset of GulfOilSpill ( $M = .02, SD = .15$ ) and CNN ( $M = .00, SD = .00$ ). Overall, Indymedia and BPOilSlick were more reliable in including mobilizing information than were CNN or GulfOilSpill. This supports H3. These results also suggest, in reference to RQ1, that some specialization has occurred: blogs may better provide identificational MI, while the political activism network of Indymedia seems to be geared best toward tactical and locational mobilization, although the differences are not statistically significant.

H5 considered proclivity to explicitly challenge mainstream or accepted truth regarding the events surrounding the oil spill. It supposed the same pattern as H4: Indymedia more likely than blogs, blogs more likely than vetted CNN iReports. A one-way ANOVA showed statistically significant difference among the sites ( $F(3, 1562) 9.485, p = .000$ ), and a Tukey's HSD showed Indymedia ( $M = .61, SD = .491$ ) was indeed the most likely outlet to include such contestation in news stories—since this variable was coded as a binary, that means 61% of all

Indymedia stories on the spill directly challenged mainstream information. This was significantly more than BPOilSlick ( $M = .29$ ,  $SD = .455$ ), which was significantly more likely to include such dispute than either CNN ( $M = .12$ ,  $SD = .326$ ) or GulfOilSpill ( $M = .08$ ,  $SD = .272$ ), the two of which comprised a homogenous subset. Again, this pattern mostly conforms to the hypothesis, apart from the two blogs diverging in reporting styles.

In regard to RQ2, the one-way ANOVAs for both comments ( $F(3, 1562) 42.03$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and author interaction ( $F(3, 1562) 23.22$ ,  $p = .000$ ) showed statistically significant difference. Tukey's HSD test revealed iReport to support significantly more of each than did the other three news sources, ( $M = 8.33$ ,  $SD = 24.81$ ). Therefore, according to the definitions of this study, CNN's platform best supported a discursive community situated around the spill coverage.

If a final tally is to be determined, Indymedia appears to promote the most alternative values. Compared to the others', the site's articles included significantly more contestations of the mainstream, significantly more critical tones, among the highest levels of all three types of mobilizing information, and showed commitment to alternative links. The only variables for which this site does not score highly are the interaction measures. Indymedia articles' are also noteworthy for inclusion of significantly more alternative sources per article than those of all other platforms. Likewise, they made use of significantly more counter-experts.

BPOilSlick, if not within Indymedia's subsets, ranks second in all of those categories, performing especially high in identificational mobilizing information. CNN meanwhile scored the highest ratio of alternative sources, and along with Indymedia placed in the highest subset of the alternative links ratio variable. iReports also were the most commented and iReporters interacted most with their community of readers. GulfOilSpill ranked third or last in all categories.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Based on these findings, we should look to Indymedia for many needs that we may seek to answer in an “alternative” citizen press—mobilizing, scrutiny of public servants and corporate actors, informational diversity, access to alternative networks, skepticism of official versions. However, as the blogs in the study showed, a reader is likely to find both alternative- and institutionally leaning journalism from citizens publishing through the format. iReport, though corporately sponsored, would be a good location for those seeking to join a conversation surrounding a disaster, and to get reports free of outside sources, for better or worse.

One way to approach these findings is to look at what “alternative” means for each news source. What about them is alternative? Looking at iReport, alternativeness means non-traditional reporting styles, even though it is hosted by a large conglomerate. Firstly, this platform displays independence from the entrenched expert-driven model—citizens are *making* the news. iReports fit Reich’s (2008) description of citizen journalism, with a greater reliance on single-source stories, based around first-person witnessing. This is radical in the same way that Atton (2002) sees Indymedia’s first-person accounts: lay citizens elevated to the status of senior columnists. However, iReporters lack the partisanship of Indymedia writers, as seen in the tone variable results. This fact is neither simply good nor bad. On the one hand, they fail to present news beyond “mere information” (Merrit, 1995), and are less likely to take the relevant moral stand called for by public-civic journalism proponents (Rosen, 1994). Conversely, slant is surely not categorically desirable in itself. Still, in this way, iReport more closely resembles its corporate owner.

iReport is most profoundly alternative in terms of access: Due to CNN's centrality in the broader mediascape, citizens publishing on this platform can truly realize the many-to-many model most of the web can only promise. Nonprofessionals' audience, while hypothetically expansive, is only truly so when partnered with real institutions. Citizen iReporters may subvert Big Journalism's hierarchy of access (Carpenter, 2008a), but not its real-world impact or cultural and economic dominance on which they depend.

Indymedia challenges the mainstream on its agenda, frames, and notion of truth. It is alternative in the freedom of its writers to take any stand or promote any point of view they choose without editorial restriction. This is evident in the tone results, and also the truth claims. These acute tones and abundant contestations—alternative to what is found in conventional news—nevertheless use mainstream standbys like expert and counter-expert sources as a foundation upon which to stand. The prevalence of truth claims display openness to challenging widely accepted information, again due to lack of editorial policy and no fear of libel suits. While this fulfills a watchdog function and introduces new information into the market, unverified claims are also surely not a clear-cut good. Misinformation may be rampant and unchecked, and declarations of conspiracy are not the picture of normative health.

Still, proof of cover-ups surrounding the spill continues to surface. As late as July, 2013, Halliburton agreed to plead guilty to charges of destroying test results in the disaster's wake (Peralta, 2013). In light of this delayed revelation, sharp skepticism was warranted, and Indymedia provided the alternative here.

Indymedia is also alternative in dedication to mobilizing. For reporters and readers alike, this outlet was likely seen as a source for MI less available from traditional news providers, which corroborates the conclusions of Opel and Templin (2004). The goals of those associated

with this platform are clearly different than those in traditional media jobs. Indymedia is founded upon social conscience and activism. This alternative content is therefore actually institutionalized, or a product of a wholly different kind of news institution and its values.

In their multi-source, link-littered stories, Indymedia writers may mirror mainstream counterparts. However, alternative-site preference leads to a more alternative web for its readers. Those visiting Indymedia are likely to encounter far more diversity of sources, outlets, and, therefore, information.

BPOilSlick, in terms of results, is Indymedia's little brother. This blog's journalism is alternative in sources and links, even if they compete for attention with institutional ones. Like Indymedia, mobilizing is probably seen as a goal for the author and his audience. Also like Indymedia, BPOilSlick's tone and contestation show freedom from editors, but the blog differs in the author's sole control over the product. With a personal blog, the outcome is representative not of a collective reporting practice or philosophy, but of an individual's. So for blogs, alternativeness may mean purity, individuality, and control—a unity to the product seen by readers.

Relative to the other outlets, GulfOilSpill is not alternative by the measures of this study. Conceptually, alternativeness for blogs, micro blogs, and social media accounts fulfilling roles like this blog's may fall under what Bruns (2003) calls "gatewatching." This distinction stands out because it is not a different form of journalism, but a shift in how it is delivered. Gatewatching is a change from the characteristics of institutional gatekeeping. Instead of an editor's judgment, informed by personal background, time limits, career pressure, or other circumstances, gatewatching allows an empowered audience to select the news. These

gatewatchers do not fill the roles of journalists, but instead merge the traditional gatekeeping process with aggregating practices (Bruns, 2003).

According to Bruns, gatewatching behavior is based upon information that is already available, which the public may transmit in the role of an “active reader,”—assessing the quality, bias and other characteristics of that which they pass on. GulfOilSpill did not give much of this kind of evaluation, however. Still, the news delivered by this site is a fairly different experience than what one would encounter through a single source like NPR or *The New York Times*.

The results of this study remind us that trying to fit “blogs” into a single construct borders on impossible. BPOilSlick and GulfOilSpill deviated sharply for most measures, confounding some of the hypotheses. Still, the blog findings are relevant to research going forward, in emphasizing the importance of function over format: The informational goals of producers and audiences are more useful typologically than is publishing technology or delivery system. Even after considering that (both blogs described their undertakings in explicit alternative terms), this study found a gulf in their product.

This study also stands as an opportunity to stress that alternativeness in and of itself is not a universal good. Normative rhetoric can be intoxicating and it pervades the literature on alternative media. Due to the body of work this study draws upon, it has undoubtedly seeped in here as well. Pains should be taken, however, to avoid reflexive characterizations of alternative as superior and institutional as inferior. Moreover, the traditional journalist, besieged on all sides, is not a scourge. The new media forms discussed in this study are valuable because they fill new roles in an expanding media environment, supplementing the professional press.



## **Limitations**

This study is limited by a number of constraints. Due to time and number of coders, the scope of the study was focused on one disaster—the BP oil spill. This restricts the generalizability of the findings, as do the choices of journalism platforms under examination. A broader range of news outlets (more blogs, social media content, more alternative- or corporate-model platforms) would strengthen the findings. The Gulf Coast may be a uniquely fertile ground for alternative journalism. Having suffered through the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina and subsequent incompetence, residents may have been more sensitive to being taken advantage of, lied to, misrepresented, or overpowered. This unique circumstance may have prompted a more proactive populace, keen to mobilize, challenge, and give voice to the margins—thus meaningfully altering the results of this analysis.

Similarly, the above mentioned constraints limited the attributes of coverage to be coded. Aside from tone, this project focused on “countable” variables; with more time or coding resources to invest, frames may be useful in explaining differing adherence to the alternative paradigm. Alternative media may pull out a number of mainstream journalism’s aspects to respond to: agendas, frames, epistemology, and so on. Emerging news sources like those analyzed in this study may be alternative on one of these levels, but fairly mainstream on another; in this way, alternativeness may go unnoticed. Because of the variables selected to measure alternativeness, this study’s assessment is thusly limited. This study also could not go beyond content analysis—more time would have allowed author interviews in conjuncture.

## **Future Research**

Future studies could extend the work of this one by including more disasters in their analysis, eliminating whatever effects may be native to BP oil spill coverage; similarly, the range

of inquiry could broaden to include more citizen news sites or social media content. Cross-national comparison of hybrid journalism paradigms may provide more information about the phenomenon as it plays out in areas with different histories, traditions, and institutions of journalism. Additionally, comparing citizen journalism with that produced by mainstream outlets would best show the true differences between them, from content to tone to reporting styles. As mentioned below, a framing analysis might be of special interest, considering anecdotal evidence that some citizen journalism platforms produce more thematically framed content than others that may lean toward episodic framing. Lastly, as this study offered conjecture into the goals of such citizen journalists, interviews could be conducted to better illustrate their perceptions of the work they do and their motivations for doing it.

**Valuing Contestations.** This study made no inquiry into the quality of the contestations it coded. They could be legitimate or baseless; the measure in these results determines only the wiliness to put forth such a challenge. Future studies could determine the worth of these truth claims. This could be achieved by determining if the claims were followed up in subsequent stories in either the alternative or mainstream media. If they reappear, they could be seen as functionally validated, at least in terms of entering a broader discussion. The claims that are ignored can be seen as less valuable. Undertaking such research would further articulate the worth of particular alternative platforms.

**Expressers and Causality.** These results may also indicate the story of these platforms is actually about the “expressers.” What guided writers in making their choice of platform on which to publish? And how does that shape the results of this study? Although this project is simply an analysis of content with no arguments of causality, it is possible the structure of iReport, for instance, directly influences its product.

It may be the case that some audience members want to include themselves in a national news story. CNN's prominence as a media outlet could attract different kinds of citizen journalists than do blogs or Indymedia. While passion may drive those who create blogs (why else would an individual publish more than 700 stories and maintain their site for three years and counting?), iReporters are more likely to contribute once and disappear.

Who are the producers for each platform? How many articles each, on average, are they likely to contribute? The more information that is known about each source, the more justified one would be in drawing such conclusions.

### **Implications**

This content analysis showcases each type's hybrid norms as they fall along the institutional-alternative continuum. Looking at alternativeness along multiple dimensions has allowed this study to offer a more nuanced view of the paradigmatic values to which each platform hews. iReports, for instance, while thin on sourcing, tend to avoid dependence on experts through documenting amateur investigations. This would satisfy Dewey and his philosophical descendants. iReporters also avoid extending the mainstream further through linking, surprisingly recording along with Indymedia a significantly high ratio of alternative links to the total. Thoughtful reflection on the totals, however, finds great value in the Indymedia approach, with its greater amount of connectivity to alternative sites, sending traffic to places that would not receive it and sending readers to sources they would not find otherwise, thus strengthening those networks.

The evaluated blogs' tendency to collect and repost links means they do often act as an extension of the mainstream (Kenix, 2009), despite whatever alternative intent is found in the mission statements. (GulfOilSpill, the least alternative platform by most metrics in this study,

declares in its banner, “We are dieing [sic], sickened in body and soul. We are jobless, homeless and many have lost their way. Yet YOU have been told the “oil is gone”, so why would you care. Please read thru this blog, the oil and the pain are very visible and still exist, one year later, along the Gulf Coast. See the dates, the oil NEVER was gone, nor the affects [sic].”)

Likewise, the blogs analyzed in this study come close to the function determined by Taylor, Wells, Howell, and Raphael (2012) in their look at social media during disaster in Australia—acting as a filter and megaphone for both official information and informal sources, reposting government links and echoing citizen reports. It is not so much an act of journalism as the other platforms encourage, but more an aggregation. Furthermore, in regard to their largely uncritical handling of mainstream links, these blogs do not appear to attempt the “recoding” that Kim et al. (2011) ascribed to South Korean bloggers. These conclusions point to a disaster-blogsphere that while not “alternative” in certain dimensions is undeniably valuable in the case of calamity.

We get a picture of Indymedia news as uniformly dense with sources and links (weighted toward the alternative type, and often critical of the mainstream even as it is included). In this way its writers are basically picking one of the “rituals” of journalism and embracing it to legitimize their work, *à la* Tuchman’s assessment of institutional objectivity (1973). Objectivity, however, is one thing Indymedia’s citizen journalists appear not to embrace. With significantly more negative tone toward the ability of the spill handlers, and more drastically, their often-supposed nefarious intent, these citizens did not seek moderatism, and instead adopted extreme tone as a news value unto itself. Naturally, explicit claims of “truth-out,” suppression, deception, cover-up, or misinformation were also standard for stories on their newswire.

Truth claims were fairly high among other outlets, too, though less than Indymedia's 61% rate: 29% of BPOilSlick's articles, and even 12% of iReports and 8% of GulfOilSpill's entries contested conventional versions of the story of the spill. One would assume most of these rates exceed those to be found among mainstream news sources, and so would appear to underscore a function of citizen news whether it is original reporting or aggregation—supplement the mainstream information that is available, or make such supplements (and contestations) to the mainstream more accessible.

That is not to say the tenor of the truth claims did not vary site to site. Qualitatively speaking, for iReporters, and the author of BPOilSlick, contestations put an emphasis on the acts of onsite *documenting*, and *witnessing* via first-person video narration or other techniques; these are still more strategic rituals, borrowing from mainstream crisis journalism the legitimacy-staking ceremonies of presence and immediacy. Reports of citizens personally collecting and testing water samples were common—displays of circumventing reliance on experts or even counter-experts for their “truth.” Meanwhile, the claims made through Indymedia put an emphasis on experts and counter-experts, marrying references to outside sources with polemical argument—often connected to broader political statements, as fitting a site with political agenda(s). Indymedia journalism, more so than the other brands investigated, viewed the events contextually: as historical, scientific, social, or systemic failures. Future studies could therefore seek to measure the frames in use, especially episodic versus thematic. This would further elucidate the styles of reporting undertaken on citizen journalism platforms.

This study prompts conjecture into the motivations of citizen journalists utilizing the various platforms. For CNN iReport, documentation; for Indymedia, rhetoricizing and mobilizing; for blogs, accumulating and centralizing information. The first two motives have had

their share of theoretical attention, but the third deserves more. If this aggregation practice is not citizen journalism outright, then it is a citizen-initiated gateway to a fuller menu of news, a citizen consciousness-raiser, a centralized, standalone version of the same type of behavior more prominently seen now in the retweet, the Facebook share, or the Tumblr re-blog—activism through link-dropping. It is often accompanied by neither criticism nor endorsement, and so is a silent curation. Such activity represents idiosyncratic web-trawls, perhaps aimed at going around the BP misdirection play mentioned in this study's introductory section. Information portals like these blogs eliminate the profit motive of other aggregators, operating independent of corporate influence, and they are marked by the subjective selection process of individuals. In such ways they may signify a new iteration of "alternativeness," overlooked outside of Bruns' gatwatching.

The platforms for citizen voices online offer channels for both useful, altruistic behavior as well as the narcissism of self-documentation seen more broadly in social media use from Facebook to Twitter to Tumblr. This fact serves as yet another reminder that new tools are never good or bad in themselves, but are instead what we make of them. Regardless, those examined here offer greater involvement of the public in the process of news making, which contributes to a more robust democracy in the eyes of scholars like Dewey, Habermas, Carey and Rosen. When citizens engage in the public sphere as they do in these conditions, they are more cognizant of events, more aware of the actions of their government, better prepared to vote and more likely to do so, and able to move policy in a desired direction.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Tables

Table 1

*Sourcing ANCOVA Results- Tests of Between-Subjects Effects*

Dependent Variable: Alternative Sources

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1653.184 <sup>a</sup>	4	413.296	563.437	.000	.591
Intercept	10.144	1	10.144	13.830	.000	.009
Total Sources	1151.474	1	1151.474	1569.777	.000	.501
Platform	61.461	3	20.487	27.929	.000	.051
Error	1145.035	1561	.734			
Total	3938.000	1566				
Corrected Total	2798.220	1565				

a. R Squared = .591 (Adjusted R Squared = .590)

Table 2

*Alternative Sourcing Estimated Marginal Means*

Dependent Variable: Alternative Sources

NewsOrg	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CNN	1.195 <sup>a</sup>	.055	1.087	1.303
Indymedia	1.130 <sup>a</sup>	.102	.930	1.330
BPOil	.928 <sup>a</sup>	.042	.846	1.010
GulfOil	.672 <sup>a</sup>	.032	.610	.734

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:

Source Total = 1.9080.

Table 3  
*Alternative Sourcing Pairwise Comparisons*  
 Dependent Variable: Alternative Sources

(I) NewsOrg	(J) NewsOrg	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CNN	Indymedia	.065	.118	.995	-.247	.377
	Bpoilspill	.267*	.071	.001	.080	.454
	Gulfoil	.523*	.062	.000	.359	.687
Indymedia	CNN	-.065	.118	.995	-.377	.247
	Bpoilspill	.202	.107	.304	-.079	.483
	Gulfoil	.458*	.109	.000	.171	.744
BPoiSlick	CNN	-.267*	.071	.001	-.454	-.080
	Indymedia	-.202	.107	.304	-.483	.079
	Gulfoil	.256*	.054	.000	.113	.399
GulfOilSpill	CNN	-.523*	.062	.000	-.687	-.359
	Indymedia	-.458*	.109	.000	-.744	-.171
	Bpoilspill	-.256*	.054	.000	-.399	-.113

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Sidak.

Table 4  
*Linking ANCOVA Results - Tests of Between-Subjects Effects*  
 Dependent Variable: Alternative Links

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5549.593 <sup>a</sup>	4	1387.398	1129.347	.000	.743
Intercept	.299	1	.299	.243	.622	.000
Link Total	4804.424	1	4804.424	3910.819	.000	.715
NewsOrg	74.972	3	24.991	20.342	.000	.038
Error	1917.682	1561	1.228			
Total	8287.000	1566				
Corrected Total	7467.275	1565				

a. R Squared = .743 (Adjusted R Squared = .743)

Table 5

*Alternative Linking Estimated Marginal Means*

Dependent Variable: Alternative Links

NewsOrg	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CNN	.908 <sup>a</sup>	.071	.768	1.048
Indymedia	1.451 <sup>a</sup>	.126	1.204	1.698
BPOil	.795 <sup>a</sup>	.053	.690	.899
GulfOil	.550 <sup>a</sup>	.040	.472	.628

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:  
Link Total = 1.4246.

Table 6

*Alternative Linking Pairwise Comparisons*

Dependent Variable: Alternative Links

(I) NewsOrg	(J) NewsOrg	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CNN	Indymedia	-.542 <sup>*</sup>	.146	.001	-.926	-.159
	BPOil	.114	.091	.760	-.126	.354
	GulfOil	.358 <sup>*</sup>	.081	.000	.145	.572
Indymedia	CNN	.542 <sup>*</sup>	.146	.001	.159	.926
	BPOil	.656 <sup>*</sup>	.136	.000	.298	1.014
	GulfOil	.901 <sup>*</sup>	.132	.000	.552	1.249
BPOilSlick	CNN	-.114	.091	.760	-.354	.126
	Indymedia	-.656 <sup>*</sup>	.136	.000	-1.014	-.298
	GulfOil	.245 <sup>*</sup>	.067	.002	.067	.422
GulfOil	CNN	-.358 <sup>*</sup>	.081	.000	-.572	-.145
	Indymedia	-.901 <sup>*</sup>	.132	.000	-1.249	-.552
	BPOil	-.245 <sup>*</sup>	.067	.002	-.422	-.067

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Sidak.

Table 7  
*Summary of one-way ANOVA results*

Variable	Sum of Squares Between (Within)	Mean Square Between (Within)	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Alternative Source Ratio</b>	58.137 (179.862)	19.379 (.135)	143.083	.000
Alternative Sources	501.711 (2296.509)	167.237 (1.470)	113.748	.000
Institutional Sources	490.981 (3102.296)	163.660 (1.986)	82.403	.000
Experts	23.369 (670.542)	7.790 (.429)	18.146	.000
Counter-experts	96.581 (694.551)	32.194 (.445)	72.402	.000
<b>Alternative Link Ratio</b>	39.458 (222.847)	13.153 (.198)	66.398	.000
Alternative Links	745.169 (6722.106)	248.390 (4.304)	57.718	.000
Mainstream Links	190.546 (3501.592)	63.515 (2.242)	28.333	.000
Non-News Links	41.485 (1905.717)	13.828 (2.242)	11.334	.000
<b>Identificational MI</b>	2.444 (85.914)	.815 (.055)	14.811	.000
<b>Locational MI</b>	.165 (28.298)	.055 (.018)	3.038	.028
<b>Tactical MI</b>	1.497 (55.280)	.499 (.035)	14.102	.000
<b>Comments</b>	13324.521 (165073.393)	4441.507 (105.681)	42.028	.000
<b>Author Interaction</b>	36.128 (810.092)	12.043 (.519)	23.220	.000
<b>Ability Tone</b>	265.487 (1616.818)	88.496 (1.035)	85.495	.000
<b>Intent Tone</b>	261.071 (1410.135)	87.024 (.903)	96.396	.000
<b>Contests Truth</b>	28.455 (196.923)	9.485 (.126)	75.186	.000

*Note:* degrees of freedom for all results are 3 and 1562. All results significant at  $p < .001$ , except Locational MI, significant at  $p < .05$ .



Table 8  
*Multiple Comparisons (All Variables)*  
*Tukey HSD Results*

Dependent Variable	(I) Platform	(J) Platform	Mean Diff (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% CI	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Alternative Source Ratio	CNN	indymedia	.317 <sup>*</sup>	.050	.000	.19	.45
		bpoilslick	.329 <sup>*</sup>	.032	.000	.25	.41
		Gulfoil	.595 <sup>*</sup>	.030	.000	.52	.67
	indymedia	CNN	-.317 <sup>*</sup>	.050	.000	-.45	-.19
		bpoilslick	.012	.046	.993	-.11	.13
		Gulfoil	.278 <sup>*</sup>	.045	.000	.16	.39
	bpoilslick	CNN	-.329 <sup>*</sup>	.032	.000	-.41	-.25
		indymedia	-.012	.046	.993	-.13	.11
		Gulfoil	.266 <sup>*</sup>	.023	.000	.21	.33
	gulfoilspill	CNN	-.595 <sup>*</sup>	.030	.000	-.67	-.52
		indymedia	-.278 <sup>*</sup>	.045	.000	-.39	-.16
		bpoilslick	-.266 <sup>*</sup>	.023	.000	-.33	-.21
Alternative Sources	CNN	indymedia	-1.552 <sup>*</sup>	.157	.000	-1.96	-1.15
		bpoilslick	-.600 <sup>*</sup>	.095	.000	-.85	-.35
		Gulfoil	.440 <sup>*</sup>	.088	.000	.21	.67
	indymedia	CNN	1.552 <sup>*</sup>	.157	.000	1.15	1.96
		bpoilslick	.952 <sup>*</sup>	.149	.000	.57	1.33
		gulfoil	1.992 <sup>*</sup>	.144	.000	1.62	2.36
	bpoilslick	CNN	.600 <sup>*</sup>	.095	.000	.35	.85
		indymedia	-.952 <sup>*</sup>	.149	.000	-1.33	-.57
		gulfoil	1.040 <sup>*</sup>	.071	.000	.86	1.22
	gulfoilspill	CNN	-.440 <sup>*</sup>	.088	.000	-.67	-.21
		indymedia	-1.992 <sup>*</sup>	.144	.000	-2.36	-1.62
		bpoilslick	-1.040 <sup>*</sup>	.071	.000	-1.22	-.86
Institutional Sources	CNN	indymedia	-2.173 <sup>*</sup>	.183	.000	-2.64	-1.70
		bpoilslick	-1.397 <sup>*</sup>	.111	.000	-1.68	-1.11
		gulfoil	-.631 <sup>*</sup>	.102	.000	-.89	-.37
	indymedia	CNN	2.173 <sup>*</sup>	.183	.000	1.70	2.64
		bpoilslick	.776 <sup>*</sup>	.173	.000	.33	1.22
		gulfoil	1.542 <sup>*</sup>	.167	.000	1.11	1.97
	bpoilslick	CNN	1.397 <sup>*</sup>	.111	.000	1.11	1.68
		indymedia	-.776 <sup>*</sup>	.173	.000	-1.22	-.33
		gulfoil	.766 <sup>*</sup>	.083	.000	.55	.98

Experts	gulfoilspill	CNN	.631 <sup>*</sup>	.102	.000	.37	.89
		indymedia	-1.542 <sup>*</sup>	.167	.000	-1.97	-1.11
		bpoilslick	-.766 <sup>*</sup>	.083	.000	-.98	-.55
	CNN	indymedia	-.396 <sup>*</sup>	.085	.000	-.61	-.18
		bpoilslick	-.258 <sup>*</sup>	.052	.000	-.39	-.13
		gulfoil	-.038	.048	.854	-.16	.08
	indymedia	CNN	.396 <sup>*</sup>	.085	.000	.18	.61
		bpoilslick	.138	.080	.312	-.07	.34
		gulfoil	.358 <sup>*</sup>	.078	.000	.16	.56
	bpoilslick	CNN	.258 <sup>*</sup>	.052	.000	.13	.39
		indymedia	-.138	.080	.312	-.34	.07
		gulfoil	.219 <sup>*</sup>	.039	.000	.12	.32
	gulfoilspill	CNN	.038	.048	.854	-.08	.16
		indymedia	-.358 <sup>*</sup>	.078	.000	-.56	-.16
		bpoilslick	-.219 <sup>*</sup>	.039	.000	-.32	-.12
Counter-Experts	CNN	indymedia	-1.105 <sup>*</sup>	.086	.000	-1.33	-.88
		bpoilslick	-.220 <sup>*</sup>	.052	.000	-.35	-.09
		gulfoil	.008	.048	.998	-.12	.13
	indymedia	CNN	1.105 <sup>*</sup>	.086	.000	.88	1.33
		bpoilslick	.885 <sup>*</sup>	.082	.000	.67	1.10
		gulfoil	1.113 <sup>*</sup>	.079	.000	.91	1.32
	bpoilslick	CNN	.220 <sup>*</sup>	.052	.000	.09	.35
		indymedia	-.885 <sup>*</sup>	.082	.000	-1.10	-.67
		gulfoil	.228 <sup>*</sup>	.039	.000	.13	.33
	gulfoilspill	CNN	-.008	.048	.998	-.13	.12
		indymedia	-1.113 <sup>*</sup>	.079	.000	-1.32	-.91
		bpoilslick	-.228 <sup>*</sup>	.039	.000	-.33	-.13
	CNN	indymedia	-.059	.117	.958	-.36	.24
		bpoilslick	.226	.105	.136	-.04	.50
		gulfoil	.536 <sup>*</sup>	.103	.000	.27	.80
Alternative Link Ratio	indymedia	CNN	.059	.117	.958	-.24	.36
		bpoilslick	.285 <sup>*</sup>	.061	.000	.13	.44
		gulfoil	.595 <sup>*</sup>	.059	.000	.44	.75
	bpoilslick	CNN	-.226	.105	.136	-.50	.04
		indymedia	-.285 <sup>*</sup>	.061	.000	-.44	-.13
		gulfoil	.309 <sup>*</sup>	.029	.000	.23	.38
	gulfoilspill	CNN	-.536 <sup>*</sup>	.103	.000	-.80	-.27
		indymedia	-.595 <sup>*</sup>	.059	.000	-.75	-.44
		bpoilslick	-.309 <sup>*</sup>	.029	.000	-.38	-.23
	CNN	indymedia	-2.005 <sup>*</sup>	.269	.000	-2.70	-1.31

Links		bpoilslick	-1.523*	.163	.000	-1.94	-1.10
		gulfoil	-.215	.151	.484	-.60	.17
		CNN	2.005*	.269	.000	1.31	2.70
	indymedia	bpoilslick	.482	.254	.230	-.17	1.14
		gulfoil	1.790*	.246	.000	1.16	2.42
		CNN	1.523*	.163	.000	1.10	1.94
	bpoilslick	indymedia	-.482	.254	.230	-1.14	.17
		gulfoil	1.308*	.122	.000	.99	1.62
		CNN	.215	.151	.484	-.17	.60
	gulfoilspill	indymedia	-1.790*	.246	.000	-2.42	-1.16
		bpoilslick	-1.308*	.122	.000	-1.62	-.99
		indymedia	-.297	.194	.419	-.80	.20
	CNN	bpoilslick	-1.054*	.118	.000	-1.36	-.75
		gulfoil	-.687*	.109	.000	-.97	-.41
		CNN	.297	.194	.419	-.20	.80
	indymedia	bpoilslick	-.756*	.183	.000	-1.23	-.28
		gulfoil	-.390	.178	.125	-.85	.07
		CNN	1.054*	.118	.000	.75	1.36
Mainstream Links	bpoilslick	indymedia	.756*	.183	.000	.28	1.23
		gulfoil	.366*	.088	.000	.14	.59
		CNN	.687*	.109	.000	.41	.97
	gulfoilspill	indymedia	.390	.178	.125	-.07	.85
		bpoilslick	-.366*	.088	.000	-.59	-.14
		indymedia	-.276	.143	.218	-.64	.09
	CNN	bpoilslick	-.412*	.087	.000	-.64	-.19
		gulfoil	-.078	.080	.765	-.28	.13
		CNN	.276	.143	.218	-.09	.64
	indymedia	bpoilslick	-.137	.135	.744	-.48	.21
		gulfoil	.198	.131	.434	-.14	.53
		CNN	.412*	.087	.000	.19	.64
NonNews Links	bpoilslick	indymedia	.137	.135	.744	-.21	.48
		gulfoil	.334*	.065	.000	.17	.50
		CNN	.078	.080	.765	-.13	.28
	gulfoilspill	indymedia	-.198	.131	.434	-.53	.14
		bpoilslick	-.334*	.065	.000	-.50	-.17
		indymedia	-.050	.030	.359	-.13	.03
	CNN	bpoilslick	-.078*	.018	.000	-.13	-.03
		gulfoil	.011	.017	.926	-.03	.05
		CNN	.050	.030	.359	-.03	.13
MI: Identificational	indymedia	bpoilslick	-.028	.029	.756	-.10	.05

MI: Locational	bpoilslick	gulfoil	.060	.028	.134	-.01	.13
		CNN	.078*	.018	.000	.03	.13
		indymedia	.028	.029	.756	-.05	.10
	gulfoilspill	gulfoil	.089*	.014	.000	.05	.12
		CNN	-.011	.017	.926	-.05	.03
		indymedia	-.060	.028	.134	-.13	.01
	CNN	bpoilslick	-.089*	.014	.000	-.12	-.05
		indymedia	-.031	.017	.278	-.08	.01
		bpoilslick	-.006	.011	.935	-.03	.02
	indymedia	gulfoil	.010	.010	.751	-.02	.03
		CNN	.031	.017	.278	-.01	.08
		bpoilslick	.025	.016	.427	-.02	.07
	bpoilslick	gulfoil	.041	.016	.051	.00	.08
		CNN	.006	.011	.935	-.02	.03
		indymedia	-.025	.016	.427	-.07	.02
	gulfoilspill	gulfoil	.016	.008	.181	.00	.04
		CNN	-.010	.010	.751	-.03	.02
		indymedia	-.041	.016	.051	-.08	.00
	CNN	bpoilslick	-.016	.008	.181	-.04	.00
		indymedia	-.103*	.024	.000	-.17	-.04
		bpoilslick	-.074*	.015	.000	-.11	-.04
MI: Tactical	indymedia	gulfoil	-.022	.014	.383	-.06	.01
		CNN	.103*	.024	.000	.04	.17
		bpoilslick	.028	.023	.613	-.03	.09
	bpoilslick	gulfoil	.081*	.022	.002	.02	.14
		CNN	.074*	.015	.000	.04	.11
		indymedia	-.028	.023	.613	-.09	.03
	gulfoilspill	gulfoil	.053*	.011	.000	.02	.08
		CNN	.022	.014	.383	-.01	.06
		indymedia	-.081*	.022	.002	-.14	-.02
	CNN	bpoilslick	-.053*	.011	.000	-.08	-.02
		indymedia	8.264*	1.333	.000	4.83	11.69
		bpoilslick	5.956*	.809	.000	3.88	8.04
Comments	indymedia	gulfoil	8.276*	.747	.000	6.35	10.20
		CNN	-8.264*	1.333	.000	-11.69	-4.83
		bpoilslick	-2.308	1.259	.258	-5.55	.93
	bpoilslick	gulfoil	.012	1.221	1.000	-3.13	3.15
		CNN	-5.956*	.809	.000	-8.04	-3.88
		indymedia	2.308	1.259	.258	-.93	5.55
		gulfoil	2.319*	.605	.001	.76	3.88

Author Interaction	gulfoilspill	CNN	-8.276 <sup>*</sup>	.747	.000	-10.20	-6.35
		indymedia	-.012	1.221	1.000	-3.15	3.13
		bpoilslick	-2.319 <sup>*</sup>	.605	.001	-3.88	-.76
		indymedia	.402 <sup>*</sup>	.093	.000	.16	.64
		bpoilslick	.313 <sup>*</sup>	.057	.000	.17	.46
		gulfoil	.434 <sup>*</sup>	.052	.000	.30	.57
	CNN	CNN	-.402 <sup>*</sup>	.093	.000	-.64	-.16
		indymedia	-.088	.088	.748	-.32	.14
		gulfoil	.032	.086	.982	-.19	.25
	bpoilslick	CNN	-.313 <sup>*</sup>	.057	.000	-.46	-.17
		indymedia	.088	.088	.748	-.14	.32
		gulfoil	.121 <sup>*</sup>	.042	.024	.01	.23
	gulfoilspill	CNN	-.434 <sup>*</sup>	.052	.000	-.57	-.30
		indymedia	-.032	.086	.982	-.25	.19
		bpoilslick	-.121 <sup>*</sup>	.042	.024	-.23	-.01
	CNN	indymedia	-1.229 <sup>*</sup>	.132	.000	-1.57	-.89
		bpoilslick	-.528 <sup>*</sup>	.080	.000	-.73	-.32
		gulfoil	.220 <sup>*</sup>	.074	.016	.03	.41
Tone: Ability	indymedia	CNN	1.229 <sup>*</sup>	.132	.000	.89	1.57
		bpoilslick	.701 <sup>*</sup>	.125	.000	.38	1.02
		gulfoil	1.449 <sup>*</sup>	.121	.000	1.14	1.76
	bpoilslick	CNN	.528 <sup>*</sup>	.080	.000	.32	.73
		indymedia	-.701 <sup>*</sup>	.125	.000	-1.02	-.38
		gulfoil	.748 <sup>*</sup>	.060	.000	.59	.90
	gulfoilspill	CNN	-.220 <sup>*</sup>	.074	.016	-.41	-.03
		indymedia	-1.449 <sup>*</sup>	.121	.000	-1.76	-1.14
		bpoilslick	-.748 <sup>*</sup>	.060	.000	-.90	-.59
	CNN	indymedia	-1.568 <sup>*</sup>	.123	.000	-1.88	-1.25
		bpoilslick	-.636 <sup>*</sup>	.075	.000	-.83	-.44
		gulfoil	-.016	.069	.996	-.19	.16
Tone: Intent	indymedia	CNN	1.568 <sup>*</sup>	.123	.000	1.25	1.88
		bpoilslick	.932 <sup>*</sup>	.116	.000	.63	1.23
		gulfoil	1.552 <sup>*</sup>	.113	.000	1.26	1.84
	bpoilslick	CNN	.636 <sup>*</sup>	.075	.000	.44	.83
		indymedia	-.932 <sup>*</sup>	.116	.000	-1.23	-.63
		gulfoil	.620 <sup>*</sup>	.056	.000	.48	.76
	gulfoilspill	CNN	.016	.069	.996	-.16	.19
		indymedia	-1.552 <sup>*</sup>	.113	.000	-1.84	-1.26
<u>Contests Truth</u>	CNN	bpoilslick	-.620 <sup>*</sup>	.056	.000	-.76	-.48
		indymedia	-.490 <sup>*</sup>	.046	.000	-.61	-.37

	bpoilslick	-.171 <sup>*</sup>	.028	.000	-.24	-.10
	gulfoil	.039	.026	.423	-.03	.11
	CNN	.490 <sup>*</sup>	.046	.000	.37	.61
indymedia	bpoilslick	.319 <sup>*</sup>	.044	.000	.21	.43
	gulfoil	.530 <sup>*</sup>	.042	.000	.42	.64
	CNN	.171 <sup>*</sup>	.028	.000	.10	.24
bpoilslick	indymedia	-.319 <sup>*</sup>	.044	.000	-.43	-.21
	gulfoil	.210 <sup>*</sup>	.021	.000	.16	.26
	CNN	-.039	.026	.423	-.11	.03
gulfoilspill	indymedia	-.530 <sup>*</sup>	.042	.000	-.64	-.42
	bpoilslick	-.210 <sup>*</sup>	.021	.000	-.26	-.16

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Contesting the Mainstream? Citizen News Platforms, the Alternative Paradigm,  
and the BP Oil Spill

Major Professor: Aaron S. Veenstra